

Royal Holloway, University of London

Academic Probation

The Purpose of Probation

The purpose of academic probation is two fold:

- to provide a period of employment during which new staff can benefit from additional support, guidance and a lighter teaching load in order to settle in and make a good start to their research careers
- to enable the College to be certain that a good appointment has been made and that the new staff member will be able to fulfil all the duties required to the required standard

It is expected that all new lecturers and senior lecturers will undertake a normal probationary period of three years.

Providing Support

Probation is a means to ensure that new colleagues have the opportunity to adapt to their new environment and in some cases to the new role that they have acquired. It recognises that there is a general 'start-up cost' of moving to a new environment and that the College has a responsibility to support new colleagues in this situation. For example, it recognises there may be more specific demands on staff time in that the College asks for particular staff development activities to be undertaken in the context of probation (e.g. CAPITAL). It also recognises the needs of new entrants to the profession to have time to build their research portfolio. Probation, therefore, provides a mechanism whereby new staff can benefit from recognition of these elements in their workload allocation as well as ensuring that a Probation Adviser is available to monitor progress and provide help as necessary.

Managing Performance

It is hoped that with the necessary support and encouragement all new members of staff will be able to reach the standard required to be confirmed in post. However, should there be an occasion where despite support the standard has not been met then it is important that the procedure followed allows the College to decide not to confirm an appointment and terminate the contract of employment. Not confirming the appointment after either the original or an extended probationary period constitutes a dismissal. See appendix 2 for details of the dismissal process.

There are significant management requirements involved in ensuring that the process is fair and can be defended in an employment tribunal should that become necessary. The Personnel Department should be contacted as soon as it becomes apparent that there are difficulties with a member of staff on probation.

It is essential that the proper documentation is available for a fair dismissal to take place. At all stages of the probationary process notes should be taken of meetings and kept on the departmental personal file. Minutes from the Probation Sub Group and letters sent to the probationer will also form part of the record.

Supporting the probationer

For the probationary period to be successful, the College recognises that the appointee will require both developmental support and mentoring and also significantly reduced teaching and administration.

Probation Advising

The Department will appoint a Probation Adviser to the Probationer who is not the Head of Department. The Probation Adviser will provide guidance and support to the Probationer and

- agree an annual work plan covering research, teaching, administration and (where appropriate) enterprise activities that complies with the College's probation requirements and is submitted for approval to the Faculty Dean
- identify specific training and staff development requirements
- meet four times a year to monitor progress and provide advice
- provide guidance on suitable outlets to target for publication

The Head of Department will meet with the Probation Adviser and Probationer at the end of the first and second year.

The Probation Sub-Group will consider the annual work plan and achievements and the notes of the meetings between the Probation Adviser and Probationer in order to ensure that both the Department and the appointee are discharging their duties in a satisfactory manner.

Workload

In order to allow for development, a Probationer will have a reduced teaching and administrative workload to be agreed with the Head of Department, Probationer and Dean.

In terms of administration, the following roles (and any others of similar size) should not form part of the responsibilities of a probationer unless agreed in writing by the Dean:

- Admissions Tutor
- Director of Graduate Studies
- Leading a large course programme
- Academic Co-ordinator

Staff development

The Probationer will be provided with training and development opportunities in education and research. This will normally include involvement in CAPITAL, training in writing research grant applications and publication strategies, and specific development as identified by the Probation Adviser and Probationer.

The Probation Adviser should ensure that s/he is familiar with the EDC and be aware of other staff development activities within the College, details of these are available on the College's Web Pages. Where they do not have expertise in a particular area that would be of value to the Probationer then they should assist the Probationer with making the necessary contacts.

Duties of Head of Department

- Appoint Probation Adviser in conjunction with interview panel
- Meet with new staff member as part of departmental induction, introduce the Probation Adviser and explain the role of the Probation Adviser and probation process. .
- Oversee and support Probation Adviser as necessary throughout the probation period. Ensure that probation meetings are happening and that Probation Adviser is happy with the probationer's progress.
- Meet with Probationer at end of first term to check that everything is proceeding well
- Meet with Probationer and Probation Adviser at time of annual reports to assess progress towards targets. Report should include comments relating to progress against the original targets, areas which need further work/support, and a general evaluation of performance. It should be clear from the report if there are serious areas of concern and what is being done to address these.
- Communicate in writing with Personnel and the Dean any problems with performance that may jeopardise the satisfactory completion of probation
- Identify all areas of concern for the Probation Sub Group
- Complete end of probation report by recommending that:
 1. the appointment be confirmed and identify any areas that still need work;
 2. probation be extended, explaining where the performance has not been satisfactory and the steps that will be taken to encourage the Probationer to reach the required standard. Details should also be provided of meetings to discuss performance that have taken place to date and the outcome of those meetings; or
 3. the appointment be terminated. Full details of all meetings, and the process followed should also be provided. NB this is not an option if previous actions relating to sub standard performance have not been taken.
- Manage departmental workload model to ensure that teaching and administrative relief can be met. No additional resources from the College are available to cover these reliefs.

Passing probation

Successful completion of probation will depend on a member of staff demonstrating at least satisfactory performance in research, teaching and service and having attended and passed staff development activities as determined by the College. These will be laid out in the formal offer of employment but will include:

- Completion of the College CAPITAL programme (subject to the caveat below);
- Meeting specified publication targets (Appendix 1);
- Meeting specified research application and third stream activity targets;
- Obtaining at least satisfactory evaluations of teaching activities, as obtained through student surveys and peer observation; and

- Demonstration of the ability to undertake relevant administrative tasks

Specific requirements for the successful completion of probation will be agreed between the Chair of the Appointment Panel, the Dean of the Faculty, the Head of Department and the appointee. These will be guided both by the priorities of the College and the disciplinary norm.

Where new appointees already have significant teaching experience or qualifications and seek partial or complete exemption from CAPITAL, they should meet with the Head of Department and the Director of the EDC. Where it is agreed that a probationer is not required to complete CAPITAL then Personnel should be notified. The Vice-Principal for Academic Affairs is responsible for making the final decision regarding exemption from CAPITAL should there be any dispute.

Early Release from Probation

Early release from probation may be agreed exceptionally at the discretion of the Probation Sub-Group, where there is evidence that the expected standards have been met and that the ongoing support that probation is intended to provide is no longer necessary. The normal circumstances in which this might happen are where the member of staff already has significant relevant experience at another institution.

The Probation Sub Group

The Probation Sub Group (The Principal, Vice Principals and Deans of Faculty) meets each term.

The Probation Sub Group will:

- Decide on policy matters relating to academic probation and ensure that probation is applied fairly across the College.
- Review annual probation reports - Probation reports are considered in detail and a decision is made about the standard of performance and the progress that has been made. Where it is decided that probation is not being completed satisfactorily then a warning will be given to the member of staff that they will not be confirmed in post if their performance does not improve. Where it is agreed that that the performance is still not satisfactory towards the end of the probation period then a decision will be made as to whether the person should be dismissed. In this event the case will then be referred to the College Secretary (Appendix 2).
- Meet with Probationers at Mid Probation Interviews – the Mid Probation Interview is an opportunity for the Probationer to raise issues directly with members of the Probation Sub Group and for a review to take place of progress to date. The interview normally occurs at the end of the second year or earlier for shortened probation periods.

The Role of Personnel

- Provide support and guidance for managing the probation process

- Notify Probationers of the name of their adviser and any probation conditions in the offer letter or as soon as possible thereafter
- Request probation reports from Head of Departments
- Arrange mid probation meetings
- Write to probationers following each annual review by the Probation Sub Group
- Administer Probation Sub Group meetings

Appendix 1: Indicative Probationary targets

The letter of appointment for a Probationer will quantify and specify the expectations on the appointee in terms of teaching and research as agreed by the appointment panel. These will include:

Research and enterprise

- grant applications
- research publications
- enterprise related activities
- broader participation in conferences and workshops at the College and in the appointee's academic community

Education

- volume of teaching
- completion of CAPITAL
- satisfactory teaching evaluations

These should be varied at the time of appointment according to the experience and discipline of the appointee.

Appendix 2: Termination Procedure

Academic Staff, whether or not on probation, can be dismissed only using the arrangements for terminating the employment of academic staff, which are currently provided for under Statute 25. In order to proceed to this there must be clear documentary evidence from the probation process supporting the dismissal.

A summary of the process is as follows:

1. Probation Sub Group decide that a member of staff has not reached the standard required to be confirmed in appointment after reviewing all the evidence, this may be following an extended period of probation.
2. The Secretary to the Probation Sub Group liaises with the College Secretary to convene a Tribunal under paragraph 16 of Statute 25.
3. The Secretary of the Probation Sub Group writes to the member of staff concerned and the Head of Department notifying them of the decision and the steps that the College Secretary is now taking.
4. The Tribunal (a Chairman, a lay member of Council, one member of staff nominated by the Academic Board and two members nominated by the University of London) will consider the evidence supporting the dismissal, hear from witnesses and the member of staff concerned.
5. The Tribunal will advise the Principal of the decision.
6. Any member of staff dismissed by the College has the right of appeal.

Approved by Probation Sub Group
November 2003
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